



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Megan Durham (202) 343-5634

FINAL REPORT ISSUED ON CONTAMINANTS ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

Nine of the country's 434 national wildlife refuges have documented contaminant problems and more in-depth study is required at another 76 refuges where there are suspected or potential contaminant problems, according to a final report just issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The report, "Preliminary Survey of Contaminant Issues of Concern on National Wildlife Refuges," differs only slightly from an earlier draft report of the same title that was released in February. The draft report identified 84 refuges with documented or suspected contaminant problems. These contaminant concerns were classified into three categories. "Category A" included refuges with known, documented contaminant problems requiring corrective action. "Category B" included refuges for which evidence suggests reason for concern, but with more in-depth monitoring and study needed to better define environmental impacts. "Category C" included refuges where there is no direct evidence of contaminants, but possible contamination is suspected.

The final report makes several revisions to the information contained in the draft report. Ninigret NWR, Rhode Island, has been moved from the ten refuges included in Category A in the earlier report and added to Category C. The draft report had indicated that military dumpsites on this refuge were known to contain solvents, but as of this date the presence of solvents is only suspected.

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One refuge -- Sachuest Point, Rhode Island -- has been added to the Category C list of refuges included in the report because of concern that potentially hazardous materials may be present in a former municipal landfill.

Finally, an issue involving buried drums of agricultural chemicals on Montezuma NWR, New York, was erroneously included in Category B in the draft report. The final report correctly classifies this as a Category C issue.

Contaminant issues were included in the report if they are believed by Fish and Wildlife Service personnel to have a persistent adverse impact on refuge habitats, animal populations, or human health and safety, or if they may violate federal or State laws, local ordinances, or international treaties.

Most contaminants identified in the report come from agricultural, industrial, or municipal activities outside the refuges and are carried to the refuges by either natural or man-made water systems. Examples of contaminants identified include pesticides, PCB's, asbestos, selenium from irrigation drainage, and heavy metals such as mercury.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is preparing plans outlining response strategies for each contaminant issue identified. The Service will then set priorities for follow-up actions, based on such factors as the source, nature, and extent of the contamination. In most cases a coordinated effort involving local, regional, State, and federal entities will be needed to remedy the contaminant issues. The Service plans to seek cooperation from those responsible for the contaminants in funding and carrying out necessary remedial actions.

As research and monitoring efforts proceed, the classification of areas in the report may change. Some issues may be found to be insignificant and be removed from the list, while other issues not now apparent may surface and be added.

Copies of the final report are available by writing to the Director (RF), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Room 2024, Washington, D.C. 20240, or calling 202-343-4311.